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This bill expands the caregivers programs to veterans of all eras. The caregivers program works, and we need to expand the program.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from the 21st District of New York (Ms. STEFANIK), the sponsor of this important piece of legislation.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today regarding H.R. 3989, the Support Our Military Caregivers Act.

After working with a constituent who was having trouble with the bureaucratic Military Caregiver system at the VA, I was proud to introduce this legislation last November.

Military caregivers are loved ones who selflessly care for our Nation's heroes behind the scenes to enhance their everyday lives.

Thankfully, the Family Caregiver Program, implemented in 2011, was designed to ensure caregivers were not forgotten. My bill would guarantee that those who dedicate their lives as caregivers receive the support they so desperately need and they so desperately deserve.

My district has the largest veteran population of any district in New York State. This has provided me with a greater understanding of the selfless sacrifice our veterans and their families provide to our community and our Nation.

Over the last 15 years of war, our servicemembers have served bravely and their families have sacrificed an immeasurable amount. So it is vital that we ensure they receive the best possible care available.

Unfortunately, the VA has had a difficult time managing the high demand of Family Caregiver enrollees, which is much larger than originally accounted for.

VA medical centers lack sufficient caregiver support coordinators and the necessary clinical staff to carry out medical assessments for eligibility. Application deadlines are not being met by their own internal standards, and the staff is still short-handed.

This bill would ensure that military caregivers have access to an objective third party to conduct clinical reviews in the event of an appeal. It also ensures that the process is transparent so that our veterans and caregivers are never left with an unanswered question.

Military caregivers are truly silent heroes in our communities and deserve the respect and benefits proportionate to their significant contributions.

Mr. Speaker, I am truly humbled to represent the veterans in my district and will continue to work to improve their lives.

I want to thank Chairman BENISHEK of the Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee for working with me on this legislation as well as Chairman MILLER

and Ranking Member BROWN for their leadership and bipartisan support of this bill.

I urge all my colleagues to support this important bill to improve the lives of our veterans and their caregivers.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge passage of H.R. 3989, as amended, a bill that is designated to create a process for external clinical review of the VA caregivers program.

I am hoping that the chairman, as we move forward, will work with the Senate and try to come up with a way that we can at least have a pilot program to expand the caregivers program.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have one remaining speaker. I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of IOWA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Support Our Military Caregivers Act, of which I am a proud cosponsor.

Congress established the Family Caregiver Program to assist military caregivers and, yet, many face delays in getting the support they need to effectively care for our wounded veteran heroes.

The Support Our Military Caregivers Act would streamline the process, allowing the Department of Veterans Affairs to contract with a third party to reduce the claims backlog.

Rather than leave care to strangers, some family members choose to quit their job and make other significant life changes to care for their loved ones. We need to do more to support them.

More and more of our veterans are returning from war with battle scars or invisible wounds of war. I often meet with Iowa veterans who have been wounded while serving our country. We have all met with them. These brave servicemembers deserve the best care and assistance we can give.

I am proud to support this bill to support our wounded veterans and their dedicated caregivers. I urge my colleagues to join me in passing this bipartisan, important bill.

I want to thank my colleague, Ms. STEFANIK, for her bipartisan leadership on this bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers at this time. So I would urge my colleagues to support this piece of legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WESTERMAN). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3989, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the process for determining the eligibility

of caregivers of veterans to certain benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

IMPROVING TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR ALL VETERANS ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5229) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a study to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, especially in regards to women veterans and minority veterans, in transitioning to civilian life, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5229

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Improving Transition Programs for All Veterans Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) The rate of unemployment for women veterans is higher than the rate for male veterans. In 2015, the unemployment rate for women veterans remained relatively unchanged at 5.4 percent, while the rate for male veterans declined to 4.5 percent.

(2) Women veterans, on average, earn less than male veterans. In 2013, the median income for women veterans was \$35,264, while the median income for male veterans was \$41,310.

(3) Women veterans and veterans with disabilities are more likely to become homeless.

(4) Service-connected disabled veterans with relatively high disability ratings have a higher unemployment rate than those with relatively low disability ratings. In 2015, the unemployment rate for veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 60 percent or higher was 9.6 percent, much higher than the 4.0 percent rate for veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or lower.

(5) In 2013, American Indian and Alaska Native veterans had the lowest median personal incomes of any group of minority veterans.

(6) In 2013, American Indian and Alaska Native veterans were less likely to have finished an advanced degree than other veterans.

(7) American Indian and Alaska Native veterans were more likely to have a service-connected disability rating compared to all other veterans. In 2013, the rate of American Indian and Alaska Native veterans with a service-connected disability rating was about 26 percent compared to 18.2 percent for all other veterans.

(8) There is a lack of data on, and an understanding of, the challenges and needs of veterans who are residents of a territory of the United States and veterans who are part of the indigenous population of a territory of the United States.

SEC. 3. STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VETERANS TRANSITION EFFORTS.

(a) STUDY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in coordination with the Secretaries of Labor and Defense, shall carry out a study to evaluate programs to assist veterans of the Armed Forces in their transition to civilian life. Such study shall be designed to determine the effectiveness of current programs,

especially in regards to the unique challenges faced by women veterans, veterans with disabilities, Native American veterans, veterans who are residents of a territory of the United States, veterans who are part of the indigenous population of a territory of the United States, and other groups of minority veterans identified by the Secretaries, including whether such programs—

(1) effectively address the challenges veterans face in pursuing higher education, especially the challenges faced by women veterans, veterans with disabilities, Native American veterans, veterans who are residents of a territory of the United States, veterans who are part of the indigenous population of a territory of the United States, and other groups of minority veterans identified by the Secretaries;

(2) effectively address the challenges such veterans face entering the civilian workforce and in translating experience and skills from military service to the job market; and

(3) effectively address the challenges faced by the families of such veterans transitioning to civilian life.

(b) REPORT.—Eighteen months after the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit a report to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives regarding the findings and recommendations of the study required under subsection (a) of this section.

SEC. 4. PROHIBITION ON AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

No additional funds are authorized to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5229, as amended, the Improving Transition Programs for All Veterans Act.

The transition from military life to civilian life is not always a smooth one. The Transition Assistance Program that is run by the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor does a pretty good job alleviating some of the stress that can occur before a servicemember leaves the military, and it is a good opportunity to inform outgoing servicemembers of what benefits they may be entitled to from Veterans Affairs and how to prepare for civilian life.

Although TAP continues to improve, it still is a struggle to fully prepare servicemembers for this short 5-day period, let alone address the specific needs each individual has in each program.

The bill before us today would be a first step in examining how TAP can further be improved to address the specific needs of minority veterans, women veterans, disabled veterans, Native American veterans, and veterans from U.S. territories.

It is important that, as a Nation, we prepare our men and women of all backgrounds for life after uniform, and the study required by this bill will give the VA, DOD, and Department of Labor the ability to review TAP and to better understand how it can be improved to ensure that we properly transition all servicemembers and address their specific needs as they prepare for life after the military.

I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO), and the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Ms. Radewagen) for their work on this legislation. It does have my full support. I would urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 5229, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of Mr. TAKANO's bill, H.R. 5229, as amended, the bipartisan Improving Transition Programs for All Veterans Act.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that veteran unemployment is at a 7-year low. As of April 2016, veterans faced an overall unemployment rate of 3.9 percent, which is better than the Nation's unemployment rate of 4.5 percent. This is excellent news.

I am proud that the numbers have improved under the leadership of our committee, the administration, and the Secretary of the VA; yet the overall unemployment rate for all veterans does not tell the whole story. Some subgroups of veterans are still struggling to find fulfilling careers that pay them well and provide an opportunity for growth.

According to the Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach at the Department of Labor, certain veteran populations face challenges and aspire to career paths that differ from the broader population of transitioning servicemembers.

To ensure that we as policymakers are ahead of developing trends regarding the unique needs of these subgroups of transitioning veterans, this bill will determine the degree to which their needs are different and look for innovative approaches toward meeting their unique challenges.

H.R. 5229 requires the VA to initiate a research program, in collaboration with DOL and DOD, to better understand if and how current veterans transition programs address what may be differentiated needs, challenges, and post-service aspirations of women veterans, veterans with disabilities, Native American veterans who are vet-

erans from the U.S. territories, and other subgroups that the Secretary identifies.

When we, as a Nation, sent individual members of the Armed Forces to war, Congress promised to support all servicemembers when they made the transition back into civilian life.

The makeup of our modern military forces is changing, and in a few short years there will be a substantially greater percentage of female veterans than there are now.

Thanks to modern-day medicine, more veterans survive injuries to return to productive life, even with service-connected disabilities.

But women veterans face a higher unemployment rate than their male counterparts, and veterans with high disability rates have an unemployment rate much higher than those of veterans with low disability ratings.

What is more, Native American veterans earn the lowest median personal income and are less likely to have finished an advanced degree than other veterans. There is much more we don't know about how these trends impact veterans from the U.S. territories.

As policymakers, we must first understand the different needs of these groups of veterans and then be ready to adapt VA policies and programs to help all veterans access the resources they need to be successful. This bill will enable us to do that.

I want to thank the leadership on this important issue and my colleague from across the aisle for being an original cosponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I don't have any speakers on this. So I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman has 16½ minutes remaining. minutes remaining.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Florida for yielding.

I rise in support of my bill, H.R. 5212, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, the initial transition from military to civilian life is often the most difficult time for returning veterans. The Federal Transition Assistance Program, otherwise known as TAP, is designed to ease that shift by teaching veterans about their benefits and preparing them to enter the workforce, attend school, or both.

As the ranking member noted, the program has largely been successful. Veteran unemployment is at a 7-year low.

However, supporting transitioning veterans requires more than a one-size-fits-all program. There are more than 135,000 former servicemembers in my district, and just one approach cannot meet the needs of every individual.

Certain veteran communities are still being left behind.

Women veterans, Native American veterans, veterans from the U.S. territories, and veterans with disabilities face challenges and aspire to jobs that differ from the broader population of returning servicemembers. We cannot be satisfied with a program that allows large groups of veterans to slip through the cracks.

The Improving Transition Programs for All Veterans Act is a bipartisan bill that requires the VA to launch a research program examining if and how the current program meets the needs of minority veterans groups.

In collaboration with the Departments of Labor and Defense, the bill would require the VA to recommend changes to TAP that would address barriers and better serve these veterans in their pursuit of meaningful employment following their military service.

More than ever before, our military reflects America's diverse mix of people and cultures. Each of these transitioning servicemembers, regardless of gender, race, or disability, has made the same commitment to defending this Nation.

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All of them deserve our full support when they return home.

I am proud to have introduced this bill with the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN).

I want to thank Mr. WENSTRUP, chair of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, and Chairman MILLER for their support in moving this forward.

Mr. Speaker, I call on my colleagues to promptly pass this legislation.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. KUSTER).

Ms. KUSTER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to discuss bipartisan efforts to improve the work our Nation does to care for our veterans.

Next week we will be honoring those who gave their lives for this country on Memorial Day. We will commemorate the lives and the sacrifices of those who died while wearing the uniform of the United States of America. We will rightly recognize their courage and commitment, but we must also ensure we continue to recognize the same courage and dedication found in our veterans and Active-Duty personnel and the challenges that many of them face as they transition into civilian life.

The Improving Transition Programs for All Veterans Act will allow Congress, the VA, and the Departments of Labor and Defense to better understand these challenges. The study created by this bill will allow us to understand what is working, what is not working, and how veterans can best be placed in a position to succeed once they transition to civilian life.

It will allow us to better understand the challenges, the unique challenges,

faced by the growing number of female veterans in our population, a group that generally has a higher unemployment rate and lower post-military salaries than their male counterparts.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill so that we can more effectively allocate resources dedicated to assisting veterans in their transition out of uniform and support several other great veterans bills on the floor today that would assist veteran caregivers and ensure that the VA develops plans to hire permanent medical center directors.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank the bipartisan committee for coming up with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5229), as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VA HEALTH CENTER MANAGEMENT STABILITY AND IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3956) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a plan to hire directors of the medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3956

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VA Health Center Management Stability and Improvement Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) According to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, several medical centers of the Department are managed by acting or temporary directors.

(2) Some of these medical centers have not been managed by a permanent director for a long period.

(3) Pursuant to section 317.903 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, a member of the senior executive service who is detailed to a temporary position in a department or agency of the Federal Government may not serve in that position for periods longer than 120-day increments, and no member of the senior executive service may be detailed to an unclassified position for a period longer than 240 days.

(4) The inability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit qualified, permanent candidates as directors of medical centers,

combined with the policies described in paragraph (3), leads to frequent turnover of directors at the medical centers which impedes the ability of system management to engage in long-term planning and other functions necessary to improve service delivery to veterans.

(5) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs should develop a comprehensive plan to recruit permanent directors at each medical center that lacks a permanent director.

SEC. 3. PLAN TO HIRE DIRECTORS OF MEDICAL CENTERS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) PLAN.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and implement a plan to hire highly qualified directors for each medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs that lacks a permanent director as of the date of the plan. The Secretary shall prioritize the hiring of such directors for the medical centers that have not had a permanent director for the longest periods.

(b) MATTERS INCLUDED.—The plan developed under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) A deadline to hire the directors of the medical centers of the Department as described in such subsection.

(2) Identification of the possible impediments to such hiring.

(3) Identification of opportunities to promote and train candidates from within the Department to senior executive positions in the Department, including as directors of medical centers.

(c) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate the plan developed under subsection (a).

(d) SEMIANNUAL REPORTS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and each 180-day period thereafter until January 1, 2018, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a list of each medical center of the Department that lacks a permanent director as of the date of the report.

SEC. 4. COMPLIANCE WITH SCHEDULING REQUIREMENTS.

(a) ANNUAL CERTIFICATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that the director of each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs annually certifies to the Secretary that the medical facility is in full compliance with all provisions of law and regulations relating to scheduling appointments for veterans to receive hospital care and medical services, including pursuant to Veterans Health Administration Directive 2010-027, or any successor directive.

(2) PROHIBITION ON WAIVER.—The Secretary may not waive any provision of the laws or regulations described in paragraph (1) for a medical facility of the Department if such provision otherwise applies to the medical facility.

(b) EXPLANATION OF NONCOMPLIANCE.—If a director of a medical facility of the Department does not make a certification under subsection (a)(1) for any year, the director shall submit to the Secretary a report containing—

(1) an explanation of why the director is unable to make such certification; and

(2) a description of the actions the director is taking to ensure full compliance with the laws and regulations described in such subsection.

(c) PROHIBITION ON BONUSES BASED ON NONCOMPLIANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—If a director of a medical facility of the Department does not make a